

A Veteran's Story

By Alice Speaker Jones

My dad is George Speaker. He is currently 91 years old and a resident at the Houston County Nursing Home. He served in the U. S. Army during World War II in the 3rd Battalion, 349th Infantry from December 1943 until August 1945 as a jeep driver. He was in the Rome-Arno, North Apennines and Po Valley campaigns.

Dad always talked about his experiences during the war and he had many interesting stories. Some were funny. Others were very frightening.

He was a farmer from Hitchcock, Galveston County, Texas. His captain was a young man fresh out of the Military Academy. Needless to say, things did not always go smoothly between this 28 year old man and a "kid" fresh out of school who thought he knew everything there was to know about everything!

The most memorable incident between these two occurred the night before they shipped out of the U.S. from Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Everyone was given a leave to go to town; everyone except George.

The Captain decided Dad should remain in the barracks while everyone else went out to party. Dad waited until everyone was gone and then he got dressed and took the bus to the Riverwalk in downtown San Antonio.

He walked into a building and up to the bar. Of all the places on the Riverwalk he could have walked into, he chose the one bar that the Captain was in. The conversation between the two did not go well, but he did not have to return to the barracks.

Jeep drivers had a very dangerous job and the fatality rate was extremely high. Dad had several close calls but was never wounded. He did lose many fellow drivers to roadside bombs and snipers.

He was once captured by the Germans and kept overnight. Dad had picked up enough German to be fairly fluent and he was able to converse easily with his captors.

They were very curious about life in America and they



George Speaker

talked through the night. Speaker is a German name and he was asked why he was fighting against Germany. Dad replied his grandfather was born in Germany and had moved to America. He had been born in America and was an American. He was serving his country just as they were serving their country.

The next day he was released. He was told he was being released because, as a jeep driver, he was not shooting at Germans. Therefore, they did not consider him a threat. They shook hands and he was sent on his way. Even though he had been a prisoner, his captives treated him very well.

Another time he was driving across a bridge when a German officer and two enlisted men walked out from under the bridge and surrendered to him. The officer stated he had been attending Yale in the U.S. and had gone home to visit his family when the war broke out.

He had been forced to join the army. He stated he liked Americans and America. He knew Germany was losing the war and he and his companions preferred to surrender than go on fighting.

Dad was also in Rome and saw Mussolini while he was hanging in the Town Square.

There was one huge advantage to spending time in Italy. Many of his boyhood friends were Italian and in his unit. Their families had emigrated from Italy and the parents did not speak English so he grew up fluent in Italian. Whenever they were near a town or village that contained

any family members they all went for a visit. The families were thrilled to see relatives from America and the Americans were thrilled to get a good home cooked meal.

In 1945 Dad was on a ship returning to the U.S. He was scheduled for a leave. After his leave he had orders to be sent to Japan. During the voyage the bombs were dropped on Japan. Instead of being sent to Japan he was released from the Army in August 1945.

There are so many more stories but the real story is that brave men and women are still serving our country today. They make it possible for us to live our lives in comfort and freedom. We may have a long list of problems, but we are still the greatest country in the world and should always remember how privileged we are to be Americans.

Veterans/Active service members called

The Houston County Historical Commission is putting together a military list of men and women in all services and conflicts. Submissions of name, rank, branch of service, conflict, cemetery of deceased or any other fact pertaining to military service is requested.

A partial list of names can be found in the chamber of commerce office, Veterans Service Officer's office, treasurer's office and historical commission office in the courthouse.

To check lists to make corrections or add names, call 544-3255 ext. 238, 636-9374, email hchc@co.houston.tx.us, or mail to 401 East Goliad Avenue #203, Crockett, TX 75835.



The Ashley family visit the Me of the American Legion Hall, wishing to remember U.S. Army.